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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION TO "PLAN B" FOR SUDAN

¶1. Several Sudanese newspapers carried stories about Special Envoy for Sudan Andrew Natsios' November 20 press briefing in which he referred to a "Plan B" for Sudan. Some included the entire briefing. There were only two editorials about Darfur and "Plan B," although we would expect there to be more reflection on this issue in the coming days.

¶2. The independent Arabic daily "Al-Ayaam" published an editorial November 22 under the headline, "Race with time in Darfur, Part I," by well-regarded Editor-in-chief Mahgoub Mohammed Salih. Salih reviewed the recent chronology of events, including the UN-AU-GOS meeting in Addis Ababa, the Tripoli mini-summit, and Special Envoy for Sudan Andrew Natsios' statements to the Brookings Institute as well as his State Department press briefing in which he referred to a "Plan B" for Sudan. The final weeks of 2006 are going to be a "critical time" for Darfur, Salih opined. Salih described the situation in Darfur as "complicated," because of the many initiatives on the table, and he further warned that it may be difficult to escape from the "dark tunnel" of Darfur. Salih was pessimistic about the resolution of the crisis, stating that there seems to be "no light at the end of the tunnel."

¶3. The independent English daily "The Citizen" published an editorial November 22 entitled, "Minawi getting fed up, Natsios threatens Plan B." The editorial refers to Natsios' press briefing, saying that Natsios "noted that there are people in the government who believe a military solution is the best approach to the Darfur crisis. That is such a gross understatement that we are wondering whether Natsios has the whole historical picture of the Darfur crisis in mind and really knows what is going on in Sudan. Mr. Natsios, please reflect on the Colin Powell declaration when he visited Darfur, look at what has been going on in Darfur up to now and think again about what you have just said. With the focus of attacks being civilians, a military solution means nothing less than genocide." Although "The Citizen" did not speculate what "Plan B" might entail, "we have not forgotten [British Prime Minister] Blair's talk about a 'Coalition of the Willing' that would confront both Khartoum and the UN with a fait accompli in Darfur, meaning invasion from Chad and Central African Republic, both of which are building their own cases against Khartoum. It is better to be wise and careful than regretting folly when it's too late. That message is for NCP [Sudan's ruling National Congress Party]."

HUME